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ARE THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVES LEGENDARY?

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I

Are the gospel narratives relating to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, taken in their obvious, and obviously intended, sense, to be accepted as truly historic; or are we to criticize them freely, and find them either wholly, or in important part, legendary and not worthy of trust? There is a third thing possible, or held by some to be possible in the way of critical method, different from either of the two foregoing alternatives. What that third thing is, and how it is to be regarded, are points which it would require the space of a full article to treat as their present importance might dictate.

To prevent misunderstanding, I feel that I ought at once to record here express recognition of the fact—undoubted fact I believe it to be—that there are some biblical students who, while admitting in general the presence of the true supernatural in Scripture, still so far yield to the importunate stress of the scientific, not to call it the critico-skeptical, spirit of their time, as to incline constantly toward keeping this element confined within its very strictest, narrowest boundaries, doubting, for instance, the literal bodily resurrection of Christ, rejecting his miraculous virgin-birth; such biblical students there undoubtedly are, who—and I now reach the fact which I wish distinctly to acknowledge—remain, notwithstanding their scruples, sincerely loyal disciples of Jesus. The biblical students to whom I refer are too reverent, too believing, to use themselves the word “legend,” much more the word “myth,” in characterization of any gospel narrative, these words being more skeptical in their connotation than they will admit to be truly descriptive of their attitude toward the New Testament. Out of sincere regard for such fellow-disciples, I should be glad myself to use in the pages following some other word than either “myth” or “legend,” if I could find—but I cannot—some other single word equally available for present purposes.

There is no denying that report of a resurrection from the dead is one of the most difficult of all things conceivable to believe. The incredulous attitude and behavior of the first disciples as to the resurrection of their Lord were perfectly natural. The account given of their attitude and behavior is one among many traits of self-evidencing truth in the gospel narratives. Even their attitude toward those many predictions uttered by the living Jesus that he would rise from the dead, was perfectly natural. It is not in the least surprising that they did not so much as understand those predictions; much less that they did not really believe them. So little impression did those predictions, when uttered, make on the minds of the disciples, that nothing but the actual fulfilment following would probably ever have brought them back to their recollection. Moreover—and this is important—but for their actual fulfilment, there never would have been transmitted to us—nay, there never would have arisen—report of the fact that such predictions were uttered. Falsified, they would have been too utterly insignificant for record or preservation. This is so evident that it may be set down as self-evident.

Why is it that a resurrection from the dead is a thing inherently so incredible? Because it is contrary to all human experience? But is it? Does not affirming it to be, beg the question? If a resurrection even once has occurred, then it is *not* contrary to *all* human experience. What is the fact? That is our true inquiry. It would be the reverse of wise, of “scientific” (to use the favorite current term), to preclude investigation as to the fact alleged, by arbitrarily assuming that the fact alleged does not exist—does not exist because forsooth contrary to all human experience. Is it thus contrary? is the very point at issue. Let us look at the evidence. The evidence must be very strong—admitted; for the fact to be proved is, admittedly, in the highest degree improbable.

That is, it would be in the highest degree improbable in the case of any other than Jesus Christ. In his case, by unique exception, the antecedent improbability vanishes, or at least is reduced to quantity so small that it may logically be quite disregarded. Even irrespectively of Christ’s predictions of his own resurrection, it may be affirmed that the resurrection of such a being as, if the gospel

records are substantially true, he undeniably was, after such a life as he had lived, and after such a death as he had died, was a thing, we cannot indeed quite say to have been expected, but certainly a thing not to excite wonder on our part; contrariwise, to be, on proper evidence, believed in without any sense of violence suffered to our reason. Yes, so much as that we can most confidently say.

Let us, however, for the moment put out of our minds this line of argument for the reality of Christ's resurrection, and soberly consider what skeptic historical criticism has to say in the way of objection to the reality of it. Such criticism says in effect substantially always the same thing. It says: "True, if the gospel narratives are to be accepted as trustworthy, then the attitude and behavior of the disciples, in first obstinately disbelieving, and then believing so strenuously as they did, the alleged fact of the resurrection of Jesus, is a nearly overwhelming argument in favor of the reality of that resurrection. But the account given of the disciples' attitude and behavior is not history, it is legend; we do not know that they took the attitude reported of them; we do not know that they behaved as it is affirmed in the gospels that they did; in fact, the gospel stories are not true history." Such, in effect, is the frankly skeptic critico-historical position.

Legends, then, let us for the moment suppose the stories in question to be. We instinctively at once inquire: What gave rise to the legends? The resurrection did not occur, is the skeptic assumption. Very well, then—when, at what point of time, was the first mistaken belief entertained that it did occur? Who first believed it, and communicated his belief to another, and another, and another, and got those others to believe it along with himself? In some such way, the legend, if legend the resurrection story be, must have arisen. No personal disciple of the living Jesus can be imagined to have been the originator of the report (supposed false) that Jesus rose from the dead. The disciples, *all* of them, showed themselves too incredulous about it, at the time when, as the gospels report, the rising occurred. Mary Magdalene? She was as incredulous as any of the disciples. Besides, if the resurrection did not occur (which is now our supposition), there was the tomb undisturbed to confirm her unbelief, and, moreover, the dead body therein which she, not believ-

ing but loving, pathetically brought spices to embalm withal for its perpetual, never-to-be-broken sleep!

But if the report, supposed false, could not have started with any of the personal disciples of the living Jesus, may it not have got its start with a later generation of disciples? Improbable, almost to the degree of impossible. A tender memory of him might have grown into an affectionate tradition about him; but such a possible tradition would have had a short life, it could hardly have outlived the generation with which it arose, and it would have given rise to no written record of his words and his works, much less have enlisted a new generation of disciples to that crucified teacher now hopelessly dead. Yes, if the report (still to be supposed false and groundless) did not start—and demonstrably it could not have started—with Christ's own immediate disciples, the lapse of time, after that first generation of disciples had disappeared, would constantly more and more increase the impossibility—if an impossibility can be increased—of the false report's getting started at all. In view of what is reported, whether truly or not, in the gospels, to have happened, and in view of what has certainly been happening for nineteen centuries since, the legendary theory as to the resurrection of Jesus (supposed unreal) is absurd, is unthinkable. The theory can be put into words, but it cannot be construed in thought. This, I am aware, is a bold postulate, but I insist upon it.

Perhaps I ought not to insist upon it. It may be a postulate too bold, to say that the legendary theory applied here "cannot be construed in thought." Let me limit myself to saying instead that as for myself I cannot construe it in thought. I have made the effort and have failed. Some person of far greater ingenuity than mine might succeed. I should like to see such a person's construing scheme drawn out to some fulness of detail in hypothetical statement. It would not satisfy my own sense of what, in order to constitute a suitable working hypothesis, is rigorously required, for him to say vaguely, for example:

"Ah, I would not apply the word 'legend' to the case. I would rather use the word 'tradition.' I would then say: A certain tradition, having in it doubtless some germ of fact for nucleus, gradually grew up and finally took definite form, written, and so thenceforward

unchangeable, in the gospels as we have them. There was never any conscious and intentional falsifying in the case. It was an automatic process of evolution from an original germ of truth—nobody in particular responsible for the result, which accordingly, though unhistorical and untrustworthy, is not to be stigmatized as fraudulent or even as legendary merely.”

Such a construing in thought would not, I say, satisfy my historical sense of what is required. The word “tradition” substituted for “legend” does not help at all. What is a tradition? It is report passed on from one to another, passed on *by* some one *to* some other. In the course of being thus passed on by many in succession to many in succession, the tradition naturally “grows,” no doubt. How grows? Through being added to—added to *by* someone. We do not get rid of the need of personal agency by using the word “tradition,” and the word “grows,” instead of the word “legend”—which names a thing that also has the habit of “growing.” “Legend” or “tradition,” whichever you will have it, the resurrection story had to have a start in some individual’s initiative. Who, supposably—I do not, of course, ask for a name, but person of what time, of what relation to Jesus, possessed of what secret, whence derived, to get himself believed, of what capacity, how acquired, to impose ungrounded belief upon himself; describe him somehow, and tell me what sort of man it was, when, where, under what conditions living, that first falsely, groundlessly (however innocently), reported that Jesus Christ rose from the dead—the fact being that the condemned and discredited victim of the cross lay undisturbed and “saw corruption” in the sealed and guarded tomb of Joseph? There was no time left vacant by the hastening march of events, in which could “grow” an ungrounded false tradition that Jesus rose from the dead. A few days only and Pentecost had come, and with Pentecost there was the erewhile coward Peter, the perjured renegade coward Peter, standing up boldly before an immense crowd at Jerusalem to proclaim that the Lord he had lately in panic with oaths denied, was risen from the dead, and was Lord of all. (Important, in its evidential value, is the fact that the pentecostal intrepidity and zeal of Peter, and with him of “the Eleven,” was not a mere momentary exaltation on their part which might be due to the transporting effect of self-begotten

subjective delusion. That same spirit lasted lifelong in all the apostles. Is it conceivable that delusion was the secret of it, the unflinching support of it?) Can the theory of false tradition be construed by anybody in thought? By the way, it deserves to be pointed out that the tradition, the report, that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, being a perfectly simple, single proposition, is a tradition that by its very nature precludes the idea of "growth." It is full-grown at once at its birth. There may be subsequent agglutination of all sorts of other matter about this as nucleus, but the tradition itself is not a tradition that has "grown." The reader will at least see how impossible the present writer finds it to construe in thought the legendary (or traditional) theory of Christ's resurrection. But there remains to be given yet one more evidence of this confessed incapacity on his part.

For there is another method often adopted of making the gospel narratives seem legend, or groundless tradition, nothing more—which is equally unsatisfactory to my own individual historic sense. That method, sometimes employed no doubt in perfect good faith, is resort to the expedient of pointing to the staggering but indisputable fact of omnivorous human credulity, rendering great masses of men, at all times and everywhere, easy prey to the most extravagant pretensions of enthusiasts or impostors, especially religious enthusiasts or impostors. There is Mohammedanism, there is Mormonism, not to mention imposing phenomena of superstitious belief displaying themselves in our own times and among us; the same tendency in human nature that accounts for the success of these systems and movements, accounts for the success of Christianity—so the argument runs.

To this view of the case it is to be replied: First, that, by very noteworthy exception to the general rule of popular credulity, a resurrection from the dead is, as was well exemplified in the case of Christ's disciples, an object of the most immediate and most obstinate incredulity; this particular incredible marvel no other religious system has for an indispensable article of its creed, while Christianity makes this its very foundation; secondly, that such a line of thought quite avoids the real issue involved. The problem is not: How did Christianity, once fairly launched on its great historic career, thenceforward easily

win its multitudes of adherents? but: How, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, did it get its first launch? Who was it—when? where? how?—that launched it, and launched it on the false report of such resurrection, seen, or not, by the launcher, to be (as assuredly it was) an article of belief quite indispensable, if there was to be a future for Christianity after its founder's death? If there was no resurrection of Christ, how came there to be a resurrection of Christianity? For a resurrection of Christianity undeniably there was.

Besides, there was the fact of the disciples' first utter incredulity as to the resurrection of their Lord. General human credulity accounts for much; does it account also at need for incredulity? The disciples did not believe, when they had reason to believe. Did they then, soon after, believe, when they had no reason to do so, and when they had, on the contrary, every reason not to believe?

It is sometimes difficult to treat respectfully the varying shifts and devices of destructive New Testament criticism. In dealing with the question of the resurrection of Christ, whatever way it may be that this criticism takes in which to account, on the hypothesis of legend or ungrounded tradition, for the incontrovertible facts existing in the case, that way always turns out to be a *cul-de-sac*, closed with inevitable *reductio ad absurdum* at the end.

Perhaps I owe it to myself, if not to my readers; still more perhaps I owe it to the propounders of that legendary theory which, on experiment with it, I constantly find to be so unequal to the task it sets itself; perhaps, I say, I ought to exhibit—very briefly it must be—a tentative of mine, essayed in all good faith, futile though it proved, to construe that legendary theory in thought. "Somebody," so I began with myself, postulating, for a start, what I suppose no one in the world would deny, or could; "somebody," I began, "it does not signify who, first said Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Why did he say that?" The next step, the answering of that question, halted an instant between two alternatives. The man who first gave voice to the momentous allegation may really have believed what he said; or he may have said it in conscious falsehood, for a purpose. This latter alternative may be dismissed with the mere statement of it; no one, I take it, now would seriously maintain the contention of conscious fraud in the matter under consideration. The supposed

first affirmer then affirmed, because he believed, that Christ rose from the dead. How came he to believe it? That is our inevitable next question. (If we could only say, "Because it happened," all would be easy; but the hypothesis under which we are working forbids us to say that, since according to that hypothesis it did not happen.) Let us say: "He came to believe it, because he wished it to be true." That is the natural skeptic answer to the question why he believed it. The wish was father to the thought, as the saying is.

This sounds plausible enough, as long as we leave it in the vague. But to leave it in the vague, is not to construe it in thought. Let us try to construe it in thought. Obviously, the wish begetting, and the thought, the belief, begot, must correspond, must agree, must in fact be substantially the same. Now exactly what, supposably, was that first affirmer's wish? Not merely to have Jesus Christ rise from the dead—assuredly not *merely* that. He must have wished his Lord—our supposed person is of course a disciple, one too of Christ's own immediate disciples, we are compelled to conjecture—he must have wished his Lord to live after his resurrection in the exercise of that messianic power which, just before his crucifixion, his disciples, for a brief moment of apparent glorious triumph on Christ's part, would seem to have happily trusted that he had been holding all the time in reserve, but was then about to exert in the immediate establishment of his kingdom. This, nothing less than this, nothing other than this, was what our hypothetic first promulger of the idea that Christ rose from the dead must have wished, when (according to the hypothesis for the moment entertained) he wished Christ's resurrection so strongly that, without evidence, he came actually to believe Christ's resurrection had occurred according to his wish.

It obviously is important, if we are to attempt accounting for a given false belief on the hypothesis of a supposed wish's having begotten it—it is, I say, obviously important, first of all, to determine, with some degree of definiteness, what the supposed begetting wish necessarily was. I submit that here the wish in question must have been such as I have been representing it. There is no other possibility to be for a moment entertained; that is, I can think of no other. Now, did the state of things that existed at the time, that stared every observer in the face, admit of any disciple's imposing upon

himself the notion that Christ, hopelessly dead in Joseph's tomb, had indeed risen from the dead and was indeed putting in active exercise the messianic power previously held by him in abeyance and was at length visibly establishing a visible kingdom on earth to the overthrow of Roman dominion and to the corresponding exaltation of Israel? This is what our supposed affirmer must have thought was in progress, if what he thought was determined and begotten by what he wished.

In sincere and loyal endeavor to make the legendary theory somehow accomplish its task, let us not even yet submit to be finally baffled. There is still a chance that looks at first blush as if we might make shift to escape ultimate defeat in our experiment with it. Although, as already suggested, everybody must admit that to suppose our imaginary first promulger of the resurrection legend, deceived by his ardent wish to have it so, could, in the teeth of what in the world of fact was laughing such a notion to scorn, have imagined that a risen Christ was visibly at work erecting a visible messianic kingdom on the ruins of the Roman domination in Israel—although to suppose this, I say, is indeed quite impossible, yet may he not have wished to believe, and therefore believed, that an invisible Messiah, the late crucified Jesus, spiritually alive, while corporeally dead, was invisibly employed in founding an invisible messianic kingdom on earth, such as in fact all Christians now, the world over, believe in, and labor to help establish and extend? This, or substantially this, is the sole alternative resort that I have been able to think of, left to the legendary theory whereby to save itself and still survive in the acceptance, or even in the decent respect, of candid, intelligent men. Let us endeavor intelligently and candidly to consider this alternative.

It will be observed that this alternative presupposes a complete, a revolutionary change of conception as to the true character of messiahship and of the messianic kingdom, from the conception up to that time universally held by all Jews, the disciples themselves not excepted. Even after the alleged resurrection of Christ, as we learn from Luke in the acts, the disciples still held to the traditional Jewish idea that the Christ was to be a temporal ruler of unlimited power, and of loyal patriot disposition to glorify Israel. Is it sound critico-historical sense to suppose that those disciples suddenly, without cause to do so,

transformed their conceptions on this subject? Were they morally, spiritually, intellectually even, equal to such a feat of transformation? And whence came to them so soon the courage to preach the transformation (supposed against all probability, actual in their own minds) publicly in the face of hostility bitter enough, vehement enough, powerful enough, to have just procured the crucifixion of Christ? The alternative, thus for a moment entertained, refuses on experiment to be construed in thought—at least, to be so construed by me.

Besides, an impossibly transformed conception of the Messiah and of the Messiah's work in the world, such as has been supposed, would not require that the disciple who achieved the transformation should wish the bodily resurrection of Christ in order to the fulfilment of his dream. His dream would seem to him to be even better in the way of fulfilment without the bodily resurrection of Christ. The wish, thus, imagined by the legendary theory to have been creative of the thought, that Jesus rose from the dead, would be wanting, and in the absence of that pregnant wish, the legend (supposed) would, hovering uneasily in the air, still wait for solid ground, or probability even, under its feet on which to alight and rest secure.

II

"To be on proper evidence believed in," I said some pages back, with reference to the literal bodily resurrection of Christ. But, "What would be 'proper evidence'?" the historical critic will with good reason ask, and add: "You surely would not have me admit that the testimony of a few women, bewildered women, to so momentous, so incredible, an event, constituted 'proper evidence.' The simple truth is that the exacting scientific spirit of today will, in such a matter, be satisfied with nothing short of qualified expert testimony for determining, first, the question, Did death in a given case actually supervene? secondly, the question, Did the subject, supposed dead and perhaps really dead, resume the functions of life? In the first place, we do not know, and for lack of proper evidence we never can know, that Jesus met with death that day on the cross. And still more certainly, if more certainly be possible, we do not know that, granted he truly died, as alleged, he afterward truly, as alleged, came

back to life. The 'proper evidence' is lacking. To satisfy the modern mind, there should have been a jury of scientific men to pass upon the fact in either case. That of course was impossible so long ago, so far away; for true science was not born till our day, nor does it now live anywhere save among us [in *Christendom*, our historical critic might have said!], and the idea of the resurrection of Jesus Christ must be relegated to the limbo of fond human imaginations never realized."

Science is "a great matter," but common-sense is sometimes useful. And common-sense asks: Do we then not know that Julius Caesar was killed at the base of Pompey's statue in Rome—not know it, because forsooth no coroner's jury of biologic experts sat upon his corpse to pronounce him truly dead? Do we, in fact, not know that Julius Caesar ever lived, because no commission of competent experts examined the man that purported to be he and pronounced that he did indeed fulfil the usual functions of life? Would not his campaigns in Gaul answer the purpose of evidence to show that he was alive when he carried them on? Certainly "the modern man" will never believe much of either the past or the present, if he requires strictly scientific evidence to assure him of facts open to everyone's common observation. Those who witnessed the crucifixion, the burial, and afterward the repeated appearances, of Jesus (risen from the dead), were, in the form of reason and common-sense, perfectly competent (even if they were women, some of them!) to testify to what they saw and heard. They cannot be ruled out of court on the ground of their not being scientific experts. There are absurd things in the world, and it is absurd to withhold belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, simply for the reason that God did not take the precaution to provide a commission of truly scientific gentlemen to look into the case and deliver their verdict, duly certified, upon it. "Proper evidence" for the astounding fact is forth-coming in abundant supply, as will presently be shown.

It is sometimes (quite too easily, because, as the present writer fully believes, unhistorically) assumed that the age in which the gospels were written, and the age immediately antecedent, in which the events recorded in the gospels occurred, was an uncritical time when legend-mongering, due to general popular belief in miracles,

abounded in Palestine. The "time-spirit" is thus invoked to account for the alleged miracles reported in the New Testament, even the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now—Josephus here being silent (except indeed as to demoniacal possession and as to methods of exorcism) and the wilderness of the Talmud (untrustworthy source of information at best) being as yet not thoroughly explored—there is, so far as is known to me, no satisfactory contemporary evidence at present available bearing on this point apart from the evidence contained in the New Testament itself. It is at once to be admitted—nay, insisted upon—that miracle in abundance is reported of there. But, what is remarkable, accompanying unbelief relative to that abounding miracle is also reported of in the gospels. It is a case of extraordinary, and yet perfectly natural, paradox. Multitudes thronged Jesus and beheld his miracles without genuinely believing in them or in him. Logically, the entire mass of the Jewish population should have been overwhelmed into believing and obedient discipleship. That this did not occur is demonstration that credulity was not a predominant, was not even a characteristic, trait of the spirit of that time among the Jews. It is noted more than once by Jesus, or by the evangelists for Jesus, that he could not, or would not, exercise his miracle-working power in certain places, because of the "unbelief" prevailing there. "Hath any of the rulers believed on him, or of the Pharisees?" asked his enemies—a question which shows plainly that, however there might be a popular tendency to credulity, that tendency did not affect the influential classes of Jewish society.

Still, if there had occurred, as in fact such a thing was far from occurring, a general, a unanimous, movement of muster and adhesion in genuine discipleship to Jesus, by reason of ready belief in his miracles, that would not have proved the prevalence in Palestine of a credulous time-spirit. Such a movement ought to have occurred. There was reason enough, valid reason, why it should occur. That it did not occur proves irrefutably that a peculiarly credulous time-spirit did not in Christ's day prevail among the inhabitants of Palestine. Guilty, conscience-stricken King Herod's terrified cry, "It is John whom I beheaded, he is risen from the dead," wildly uttered when he heard of Christ's "mighty works," is sometimes adduced to make

it seem probable that a resurrection from the dead was an idea not unfamiliar in that day and one easily believed in—singular use of a half-crazed man's exclamation of panic alarm, to be hazarded in face of the fact that not only are no "mighty works" attributed to John the Baptist by either history or tradition, but by John the evangelist it is expressly recorded that the people noticed and said concerning John the Baptist, he "did no sign." It is noteworthy that Martha, in the agony of her grief for her deceased brother, and in the ecstasy of her faith in the power of Jesus to have kept him alive, never once thought of such a thing as his being now raised by Jesus from the dead. The idea of a possible present resurrection for Lazarus was apparently as remote from Martha's mind as in like case it would be from anyone's mind among us today.

Incontrovertibly, at least as to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the time-spirit in Palestine was exactly and intensely the opposite of friendly to belief in it and acknowledgment of it. This is even startlingly evident on the very face of all the accounts that we have of the actual state of the facts existing in the place at the time. If there had been in Palestine during Christ's time a prevailing popular tendency to imagine and attribute miracle, it is as nearly certain as anything not quite certain well could be, that John the Baptist, an acknowledged prophet, of commanding influence, of universal popular renown, would have been a favorite subject of legend and tradition. As to Christ's resurrection, I repeat it, the unbelieving, the hostile, spirit dominated the Jewish mind.

The penetrative, the well-nigh irresistibly penetrative, power of prevailing public opinion (the time-spirit) in Palestine, was, then, such as I have described it. "Crucify him!" was its demoniac final cry. The disciples of Christ lived and breathed in this atmosphere. That finally they should have withstood its influence and have overcome it, and this in spite of their own instinctive and persistent incredulity, is one of the wonders of history. It is a wonder that can be rationally explained in only one way, and that one way is to admit the reality of the fact which they in the teeth of so much hostile influence believed, asserted, died to attest. In the absence, the non-existence, supposed, of that fact, what was there to render it probable—nay, to render it conceivable—that he, a man discredited by his

crucifixion and by the ignominious falsifying, through failure, of his promise and prophecies, would, in the near event, become the subject of groundless glorifying legend? There was nothing, nothing. The gospel stories are not to be set aside as simply one product among many of legendary disposition rife widely in their time. There was no such legendary disposition then at work, least of all at work concerning a crucified malefactor. Those gospel stories are not legend.

By the way, the very remarkable contrast shown by the gospel accounts to have existed between Jesus and John the Baptist, in the abundance of miracle attributed to the one, and the total absence of miracle attributed to the other, has a second aspect of evidential bearing, exceedingly well worthy of note, additional to the one that has just been pointed out, with its evidence that disposition to invent and attribute miracle was no trife in Palestine during the time of those two great figures in Jewish history. Here were two prophets of Israel, absolutely contemporaneous, both of them filling the whole land with their prophetic renown. One of them surrounded himself living, and dying left his memory encircled, with a halo of miracle-working fame, incomparably beyond that of any personage that had ever preceded him, or that has ever followed him. The other, though "a prophet and more than a prophet," lives in history as simply a "voice." Why this difference? Legend could not possibly have created the difference. So far as prophetic power and prophetic fame tendet to beget legend, there was the same reason in the one case as in the other—reason exsisting in both cases in approximately the same degree—why legend of miracle-working should accompany both the two names. But it does not. Why the difference? There is but one reasonable answer to the question. That answer is, first, John "did no sign," and, secondly, the "signs" attributed to Jesus are truly attributed to him. Here then is unexpected additional evidence, if additional evidence were needed, to prove the gospel narratives of miracle historical and not legendary. If the miracles of Jesus were legendary, there would infallibly have been legendary miracles for John the Baptist. I have not been able to think of any satisfactory explanation of the remarkable difference thus pointed out between Jesus and John, any explanation indeed deserving a

moment's consideration, except the obvious explanation that Jesus was a true miracle-worker, while John was not. That these two kindred prophets should have flourished side by side, with such a contrast subsisting between them at this vital-point, looks like a divinely devised method of accrediting Jesus to all ages of men, as one uniquely worthy to be glorified in being declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.

I beg the reader to remember that the legend, if legend there was in the case, was not a simple, single legend barely affirming that Jesus rose from the dead. It was a legend with circumstance, a detailed legend—in fact, a very involved and complicated legend; a legend resolvable into many legends, all of them as little likely ever to have arisen, without the actual occurrence of the fact, as was the main legend itself about which they grouped themselves. Even a legend has to have a start. What—I repeat the question—what was the start of this legend, this false report, that is to say, that Christ rose from the dead? I do not hesitate to say that *no* start for it, plausible enough to be respectfully entertained, is even conceivable. I check myself again, and say, conceivable by me. But were it conceivably once started, there is no conceivable way in which it could subsequently have continued to be maintained, that is, to be credited as veritable history. And then there is the great historic fact, the indestructible historic fact, of the apostle Paul, not of the apostle Paul's express testimony, but of the apostle Paul himself and his great career—a problem he, impossible to be rationally solved except upon the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to an eternal throne of omnipotence in the heavens.

“Not of the apostle Paul's express testimony”—but this momentary waiver of such testimony is not to be misunderstood. It is far from being intended as any disparagement of it. Quite to the contrary of that, Paul's express testimony has in my view a peculiar, an incalculable, value which ought to be strongly insisted on. Apart from the extraordinary convincing power of the historic phenomenon that Paul was, apart from the extraordinary convincing power of the miracle by virtue of which Paul became the historic phenomenon that he was—apart, I say, from these two things, separately and concurrently so powerful to convince, the further consideration that such

a man as Paul was, a man of intelligence so penetrating, of intellectual discipline so thorough, of judgment so sane, of native temper so haughty, so imperious, of prior attitude so hostile, living as Paul did in the very center and focus, both as to time and as to place, of the events concerned—that this man, being altogether such and so conditioned, should have come to be persuaded, immovably persuaded, *no matter how*, that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, is, soberly considered, an evidence of the reality of that stupendous fact sufficient by itself alone to constitute a reasonable basis for the same persuasion to every thoughtful mind of whatever succeeding generation of men. Paul would not have believed without compelling cause to believe, miraculous or other; that he did believe is therefore reason enough for our believing.

Let us still consider a little with candor and with calmness the unavoidable conditions of the problem with which we have to deal. It has, I may assume, been made clear that in using the expressions, “legend,” “legendary theory,” I have in mind no one particular form of such treatment among the many forms to which the gospel narratives have actually been subjected. I mean any form of such treatment that assumes the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus not to have occurred. I need to be even more explicit, for the skeptical treatment of the gospel narratives is very full of shifts. I mean, then, by “legendary theory” whatever theory assumes that the bodily resurrection of Jesus—his literal resurrection, as distinguished from a figurative, his physical resurrection as distinguished from a spiritual (that is, an influence from him posthumously revived and indefinitely continued)—I mean, I say, whatever theory assumes that such a real resurrection of Jesus did not occur, that the report of its having occurred is false. One exception I need to make in saying this; for there is one critical theory, not best described as “legendary,” which yet, like the legendary theories, denies, or at least holds in doubt, the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus. The critical theory thus referred to might appropriately be dealt with under a second interrogative title, “Misunderstood?”

The crude critical short way once was, to dispose of the gospel narratives very summarily by declaring them the concoction of fraud. This method seems to have been employed very early, for the apostle

Peter, apparently in view of such a charge already then brought against the apostles' testimony, protests: "We [he and his fellow-"eyewitnesses"] did not follow 'cunningly devised fables' in proclaiming the power and glory of Jesus Christ." (This note of Peter's shows that the apostolic age was not too credulous to furnish itself with critics and skeptics.) But the gross critical theory of fabrication for the gospel narratives has long since been abandoned. Even the mythical theory, which seemed a softening from the fabrication theory, and, three-quarters of a century perhaps ago, was very bold and confident of triumph, is now nearly or quite obsolete. It perhaps still flourishes up occasionally in a book or an article produced by some New Testament critic who has belatedly been informing himself on the subject, and who naïvely enjoys the fallacious sensation of important discovery, he not having brought continuously down to date his researches in the ever-varying state of this ever-"burning" question. But in general it may be said that New Testament critics of the time current are careful to avoid seeming to confess any dependence upon mere myth in dealing with the historical and interpretative problems presented by the gospels. Even the less destructive-seeming word "legend" is seldom now used by New Testament critics. Some of them find in the gospels matter "not historical," which, however, they avoid calling "legendary." Legendary in fact, such matter of course generally is, wherever it is found, and I apply the term here because I need some single word to designate it briefly.

The theory of the genesis of the resurrection "myth," lightly set forth, perhaps a half-century ago, in certain French romances dealing with New Testament history, may be mentioned, although it has now only a quasi-antiquarian interest, so completely have those charmingly written romances, purporting, though they do, to be serious historical treatments of their subjects, been discredited in point of critical value. Their author is that brilliant pseudo-critical Semitic scholar who, treating of Hebrew history, exposed himself by hazarding the assertion (at the very moment, it happily chanced to be, when the Tel-el-Amarna tablets were uncovered to confute him) that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch for the reason that the art of writing was not known to Israel in his time! According to this method of disposing of the gospel narratives, it was a case of hallucina-

tion pure and simple, due to an overwrought, half-hysteric state of mind in the disciples. Mary Magdalene is given a great part in the illusion. She perhaps, so it is conjectured, was earliest to feel the demonic stress upon her spirit, and the contagion of hallucination easily spread abroad to all from her. Nothing easier!—although the narratives supply no hint to encourage the explanation. It might be called the method of mental contagion. Parallel instances are unhesitatingly said to abound.

As has been pointed out, the main legend (to indulge the notion expressed by the word) is accompanied with a considerable number of minor legends vitally related alike to that and to one another. What I wish now additionally to point out is that, if the main fact alleged—namely, the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus—is a legend, then the legends accompanying, in the gospel report of that, are not, I submit, *such in character* as can rationally be imagined to have arisen. Just *such* subsidiary stories as are found in the gospel narratives respecting the resurrection of Jesus, require the actual occurrence of that resurrection to account for their appearance in the history. For example, take the statement that Jesus, in express terms singularly detailed and definite, foretold his own impending death and subsequent resurrection—that statement it would never have occurred to anyone, either friendly or hostile to Jesus, whether contemporaneous with him or of a following generation, to make, unless Jesus did do such foretelling. And if he did do such foretelling, and the foretelling was promptly falsified by the fact, then, I ask, had not Jesus beforehand effectually discredited himself as prophet, and as, in a peculiar, a unique, sense, Son of God, and thus rendered it impossible that he should ever have any following after his death, or ever become the subject of admiring, glorifying legend and tradition?

That Jesus did really make those predictions is rendered, as it were, superfluously certain by the fact that in one instance (there were many instances) a very remarkable incident accompanied—an incident inconceivable as the product of legend, and inconceivable as not having had one of those repeated solemn predictions from Jesus for its occasion. Peter, irrepressible Peter, took in hand to “rebuke” his Lord for predicting those dreadful things of his own imminent future. Both Matthew and Mark relate this, together

with the staggering retorted rebuke from his Lord that Peter thus drew upon himself in the presence of his fellow-disciples. The evangelist Mark, by the way, takes pains to say expressly that Jesus made this prediction of his, not "somewhat vaguely," but "openly;" that is, without reserve, definitely.

Now would it, could it, ever have occurred to a legendary—for a legend presupposes a personal legendary—to state that the disciples of Jesus did not understand those predictions of his, supposed made? The natural thing would have been rather to say that the disciples treasured those remarkable predictions in their hearts and waited eagerly after the crucifixion to see whether they would be fulfilled. Yet further, it would never have occurred to a legendary to represent the disciples to have been, all of them, as it were stupidly incredulous in their attitude toward the resurrection of Jesus. The natural thing would rather have been to conceive of them as expectant, as refusing to admit to themselves, until at least the three days of the prediction were past, that their Lord was irretrievably dead.

True indeed, as has previously been pointed out, both the incredulity and the slowness of understanding attributed to the disciples, were perfectly natural. But that they were thus natural, it would have been beyond the subtlety, beyond the blind good fortune, of any legendary to divine. Only in the light of the report, paradoxical at first blush, supplied to us in the gospels, that these two attitudes of mind did in fact subsist with the disciples, do we see how natural, how inevitable, they were. The report itself is thus, in a peculiar manner, its own unimpeachable and irrefutable voucher.

Left to himself, in the absence of fact to guide him, the legendary would naturally have had the disciples hold watch at the tomb that they might witness the resurrection when it occurred. Then, in the gayety of his imagination, rejoicing in its sense of freedom to invent whatever would contribute to exalt his hero and to delight believers in him, he would infallibly have gone on to provide a famous flourishing account of the occurrence and of its overpowering effect upon the witnesses of it; a flamboyant report it would have been, replete with prodigies and marvels—a report in fine, contrasted with which the restrained, simple, and solemn sublime narrative of Matthew would seem tame and dull indeed. Legends, wonderful legends, tend by

their very nature to become extravagant. The remarkable sobriety and self-possession of the gospel narratives, their perfectly maintained superiority to the temptation to draw themselves out in detail and circumstance of marvel—this is an unmistakable note of the truly historical, in discrimination from the laxly and loosely legendary.

In short, all in the gospels is exactly as we can now see it should have been, if the resurrection of Jesus was a literal historic fact; while much at least in the gospels is as it could not rationally be supposed to have been, if the resurrection of Jesus is not a fact, but a legend. The remarks immediately foregoing, as to the improbable, the impossible, character of the incidental stories considered as legends that accompany the main story of the resurrection of Jesus, might be supported by the pointing out of additional specific instances supplied in the gospels.

Speaking now in the character, not of a Christian apologist, but of a disinterested student and critic of history (a student and critic not prepossessed with the disqualifying anti-scientific assumption that a certain event, which men may choose to call a miracle, could not, because it would be a miracle, occur)—speaking, I say, in this judicial critical character, I with all confidence submit that, quite apart from any question of their peculiar divine inspiration, the gospel narratives in general, the narratives respecting the resurrection of Jesus certainly not excepted, are, sanely studied in their own extraordinarily self-evidencing character, and then besides in the extraordinarily confirmatory light of nineteen finished centuries of Christian history—those gospel narratives are, I submit, the most trustworthy memorial monuments of a remote past that exist anywhere in human language. Petty discrepancies of statement contained in those narratives, though they may be discrepancies absolutely irreducible—that is, admitting of no possible adjustment and harmony—will be judged by the truly wise unprejudiced students of the documents to strengthen rather than weaken the substantial trustworthiness in the main of the accounts. The gospel narratives abruptly and definitively refuse to be set at naught as collections of legend and tradition.